

# Medical Issues in Elderly Populations

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# Chronic Disease in the Elderly

- 88% people > 65 years of age have at least one chronic health condition
- Major contributors are:
  - tobacco use
  - lack of physical activity
  - poor eating habits
- Promoting healthy behavior choices, through education and through community policies and practices, is essential to reducing the burden of chronic diseases.

# Cardiovascular Health

- Heart Disease is nation's leading cause of death
  - Stroke is 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death overall
- 1.4 million Americans die of cardiovascular diseases each year = 1 death every 36 seconds
- 1 in 3 U.S. adults has hypertension and 37.4% (about 42 million people) has prehypertension (SBP 120–139 mm Hg or DBP 80–89 mm Hg)
- 105 million U.S. adults have cholesterol levels of 200 mg/dL or higher
  - This exceeds the *Healthy People 2010* objective of <200 mg/dL

# Cancer

- Second most common cause of death in the United States
- Can be controlled through prevention, early detection, and treatment
- Behavioral and environmental factors increase cancer risk
- Cancer screening services and high-quality treatment must be available and accessible, particularly to medically underserved populations

# Diabetes

- **Seven million persons aged 65 years or older (20.1% of all people in this age group) have diabetes**
- **Early detection, improved delivery of care, and better self-management are the key strategies for preventing much of the burden of diabetes**

# Arthritis

- Leading cause of disability in the United States affecting nearly 43 million Americans
  - Projected to increase to 67 million by 2030
- Most common types:
  - Osteoarthritis
  - Rheumatoid arthritis
  - Gout
  - Fibromyalgia

# Osteoporosis and Falls

- One of three persons aged 65 years and older falls each year
  - Falls are leading cause of injuries, hospital admissions for trauma, and deaths due to injury
- In 1999, about 10,097 seniors died of fall-related injuries
- Approximately 250,000 hip fractures occur each year among people over age 65
  - 20% mortality associated with hip fractures

# Cognitive Health

- One in four older adults experiences cognitive decline in: learning, memory, decision-making, and planning
  - not a normal part of healthy aging
- Normal changes usually mean a slower pace of learning and the need for new information to be repeated
- Older adults with cognitive decline have a higher risk of developing dementia later in life
- Among Americans 65 years and older, approximately 6–10% have dementia, and two-thirds of people with dementia have Alzheimer's disease



# Depression in the Elderly

- 8 to 20% of elderly suffer from depressive symptoms
- May be attributed to comorbid conditions
  - Medical and neurologic illness
- Social isolation is a risk factor
- Risk of morbidity and mortality if untreated
- Limited studies on antidepressants in the elderly but recent small trials demonstrate efficacy
- With antidepressants in the elderly: start low and go slow

# Polypharmacy

- Multiple chronic conditions require multiple medications
- Potential for drug interactions
- Side effects can be more severe in the elderly

# Health-Related Behaviors

- Nearly 40% of deaths attributed to smoking, physical inactivity, poor diet, or alcohol
- Adopting healthy behaviors can decrease risk
  - eating nutritious foods
  - being physically active
  - avoiding tobacco use

# Physical Activity

- By age 75, about one in three men and one in two women do not engage in any physical activity
- Physical activity:
  - reduces risk from dying of heart disease
  - decreases risk for colon cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure
  - helps to control weight
  - contributes to healthy bones, muscles, and joints
  - relieve the pain of arthritis
  - reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression
  - can decrease the need for hospitalizations, physician visits, and medications

# Nutrition

- Diet low in saturated fats w/ five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily
- Reduces the occurrence of chronic diseases:
  - heart disease
  - Strokes
  - Cancer
  - Diabetes
  - osteoporosis